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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: APEC

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies continued to focus their coverage November 21 on Taichung Mayor Jason Hu's wife, who is in a critical condition following a serious car accident last Saturday. News coverage also focused on Taipei Mayor Ma Ying-jeou's alleged misuse of the special mayoral allowance; on the KMT's ill-gotten assets; and on the upcoming Taipei and Kaohsiung mayoral races. A "United Daily News" survey showed that in the wake of the controversy over Ma's special mayoral allowance, public support for Hau Lung-pin, the KMT mayoral candidate for Taipei, has dropped from 44 percent to 42 percent, while support for DPP mayoral candidate Frank Hsieh rose from 15 percent to 20 percent. The same poll also found that public support for Huang Chun-ying, the KMT mayoral candidate for Kaohsiung, remains at 39 percent, while support for DPP mayoral candidate Chen Chu rose from 24 percent to 26 percent.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-status quo "China Times" urged Taiwan to face and ponder its current situation in the Asia-Pacific region pragmatically. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" called on the Taiwan authorities to work on maintaining a sustainable partnership with the current U.S. administration while reinforcing dialogue and traditional support from the Democrat-controlled Congress. End summary.

A) "Taiwan Should Pragmatically Face Its Situation in the Asia-Pacific Region"

The pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (11/21):

"... Indeed, judging from its content, the 'Hanoi Declaration' issued at this year's APEC annual meeting was of more symbolic meaning than of substantive importance. ... This year's [APEC] declaration was in reality not too different from the ones issued in the past few years in terms of content, so it proved that when it comes to trade and economic issues, the APEC annual meeting is indeed a forum in which dialogue outweighs everything else. But this does not mean that the APEC annual meeting is no longer important; on the contrary, since all leaders [of the member countries] participate in the [APEC] annual meeting every year, it naturally constitutes a perfect occasion for a leaders' summit. Each year, leaders of various nations, on top of the summit, arrange additional bilateral or multilateral meetings on issues such as politics, economics and security. The importance of these additional meetings often far exceeds that of the theme of APEC that year. ...

"Perhaps the APEC will issue a perfunctory declaration each year, but more and more moves have been taken by the member nations to engage in trade and economic interaction and integration using the APEC meeting. Chinese President Hu Jintao will visit India immediately after the conclusion of the APEC meeting to test the possibility of signing a bilateral free trade agreement in an

attempt to form the so-called huge 'Himalayan economic zone.' The move has immediately caused anxiety on the part of South Korea and Japan, which fear that they will be excluded from the zone. In other words, the situation in the Asia-Pacific region is changing every day, and it seems that only Taiwan remains completely insensitive to the situation it is in."

B) "Bush's Messages and U.S.-Taiwan Ties"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (11/21):

"... In Hanoi, Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice emphasized the significance for the U.S. to strengthen partnerships with Asian allies to tackle regional challenges associated with international terrorism, avian flu and the festering nuclear crisis in the Korean Peninsula. Rice's explicit and aggressive support for APEC and the emergence of a 'true Asia-Pacific Economic Community' clearly aimed to counter notions that the Democrats new majorities in both houses of the U.S. Congress would hamstring the right-wing Bush administration during the last two years of his second and last term. Ironically, the shift also marked at least a partial reaffirmation of multilateralism after six years of Bush unilateralism. ...

"More substantially, the failure of Taiwan's proposed procurement of three advanced defensive weapons systems approved by Bush in April 2001 to escape from the irrational boycott by KMT and PFP legislators has deepened concerns in Washington that Taipei is not willing to take more responsibility for its self-defense and has severely damaged the usually firm U.S. congressional support for Taiwan. In the wake of these trends and the November 7 mid-term elections, the top priority of the Taiwan government must be to work on maintaining a sustainable partnership with the current U.S. administration while reinforcing dialogue and traditional support from the Democratic Party-controlled Congress for Taiwan's democracy.

"Continued democratic consolidation and political reforms are Taiwan's greatest assets compared with the PRC's authoritarian rule and its increasingly military and diplomatic belligerence. Taiwan should therefore strive to secure a status as a partner with the United States to promote 'bottom-up' grassroots democracy in other Asian nations. ... At the same time, Washington, including the Bush administration and the incoming Democratic Congress, should encourage Taiwan's striving for good governance and political institutionalization as a solid basis for a sustainable relationship and assist Taiwan in joining the international community of democracies, instead of calling on Taiwan to sacrifice its democratic deepening in order to appease Beijing. ... The U.S. government needs to consider whether it will be possible to cultivate Beijing as a responsible stakeholder and foster Chinese democracy if Taiwan's full-fledged democracy cannot be safeguarded from the threat of PRC military expansionism."

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